

## Bible Based

The first time I heard "Virtually spotless,"—a popular phrase years ago in TV ads for a dishwasher detergent—I thought, "How wonderful! Spotless dishes." Eventually it dawned on me that the word *virtually* means *almost*. The advertisement focused on the word *spotless*, but the ad really said this detergent gets dishes spotless—*almost*.

Driving home one day, I spotted a church building whose sign out front said, "The Way." As I got closer, I saw beneath, in smaller letters: *Bible based*. I wondered what that meant. It took my breath away when I realized *virtually spotless* and *Bible based* worked the same way. We hear the word Bible and think the church uses the Bible as its guide. Not accurate. *Based* means that the church can choose any part of the Bible, large or small, adopt that as its mantra, and advertise itself as *virtually spotless*, I mean, *Bible based*.

In practical terms, here's an example. The Church of Christ denomination takes its stand on a single sentence in the Bible: Acts 2:38. "Believe and be baptized and ye shall be saved." That sentence, for them, dominates the 1,350 pages of stories, rules, sermons, and injunctions. Without it, they're out of business. With it, they are Bible based.

Of the ten words given to Moses, the fourth says: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work." Ignoring the fact that this law is not an order to attend church but a command to rest, Seventh Day Adventists understand it to mean: go to church on Saturday. They teach that all who go to church

another day of the week are breaking that commandment. Without that injunction, their denomination collapses. With it, they're Bible based.

The Russian Orthodox, the Greek Orthodox, and the Roman Catholic churches, with a combined membership of 1.5 billion members, rely on two sentences in Matthew 16: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." For them, these sentences dominate the Book. Catholics are Bible based.

Baptists are twice as good as other denominations because they have not one, but two Bible passages they point to: John 3:16, "For God so loved the world he gave his only son, so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life," and Ephesians 2:8, 9 "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, not of works lest any man should boast." Baptists qualify as Bible based.

As it turns out, no denomination is based on the *entire* Bible, for two very good reasons. First, the Bible sends out mixed messages. When Jesus tells his disciples in one gospel: "Ye are the light of the world," then in another gospel: "I am the light of the world," we say whaaaat? When one writer says to enter the kingdom, "Ye must be born again," and another story has ordinary people entering simply because they cared for the needy, choose one!

Secondly, not only does the Bible send out mixed signals, but there are some passages that are universally ignored: Deuteronomy 21:18–21. "If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father and mother, who does not heed them when they discipline him,

then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his town at the gate of that place.

"They shall say to the elders of his town, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.' Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death with stones. So, you shall purge the evil from your midst; and all Israel will hear and be afraid." (RSV) We turn a **blind eye to weird passages** in the Bible like this one.

If I were searching for a church, I would not ask if it were Bible based; they're all Bible based. Instead, I would visit one and see if the people are friendly and their minister speaks well. If I find those, I am almost home.

If I'm happy with my church, I might be tempted to think that, while other churches are Bible based, "My church has a better grip on the Bible than other churches." In other words, "My church is 'more right' than my neighbor's church." If we're not careful, we'll find ourselves guilty of the sin of pride. So, if you are a churchgoer, no matter which church you attend, be generous. Respect other churches. They're all Bible based and virtually spotless.

My friend Robert Pethoud pointed out phrases similar to "Bible based" and "virtually spotless." Have fun with "studies show" and "7 out of 8 doctors recommend."